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# Illinois Department of Conservation

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# Illinois Department of Conservation

## Division of Forestry

By ANTON J. TOMASEK  
*State Forester*

THE State Division of Forestry was organized in 1926 as a division of the Department of Conservation. It was organized at that time as a result of an increased need for proper forestry practices within the State on the part of the owners of timber land and potential timber lands.

The objectives of the Division are as follows:

1. To promote and assist in the reforestation of idle lands unfit for agriculture.
2. To prevent and control woods fires.
3. To control erosion by the planting of trees.
4. To establish State forests to act as demonstration areas in timber land management.
5. To assist Illinois farmers and landowners and corporations in woodland management practices.
6. To assist in the establishment of county and community forests.
7. To disseminate forestry knowledge through the publication of forestry literature.

### **Reforestation**

Illinois has within its total land area of approximately 35,000,000 acres, 3,000,000 acres of land that should be reforested. These lands are lying idle at present, due to the fact that they are too poor for agricultural purposes. As such, they provide an economic burden to their owners and to the

State because they are unproductive. These same lands will grow trees profitably; therefore, it is necessary that they be planted to trees for a future timber crop which ultimately will bring a revenue to the landowners and community.

To meet this situation the Department of Conservation Division of Forestry has developed two large forest tree nurseries, capable of producing 20,000,000 trees annually for reforestation and erosion control purposes. These trees are available to farmers and landowners at prices varying from \$2.00 to \$6.00 per thousand, depending upon the species of trees desired. Trees secured from the State must be used only for reforestation and erosion control and the law prohibits their use for landscape or ornamental plantings.

Definite progress has been made in the State reforestation program of idle lands. The first major distribution of trees took place in 1936 at which time 300,000 trees were planted in the State. Since 1936 the State's reforestation program has steadily been enlarged yearly to the extent that in 1940 6,250,000 trees were distributed from State nurseries, and in 1941, over 10,000,000 trees left the Division's nurseries to be planted by farmers, corporations, and public agencies in the State.

Considerable progress has been made, however, it is hoped that the reforestation program in Illinois will continue to expand until all idle lands in Illinois are growing a timber crop.

### **Forest Fire Protection**

Our woodland fires in Illinois always present a serious problem to the future growth and quality of our forests. Thousands of dollars worth of damage is done annually to our existing woodlands by fires, which not only destroy our merchantable timber, but also cause a severe mortality to young forest seedlings. Fires have serious effects on the soil, destroy wildlife, affect the entire biological balance of the forest. Every effort should be made therefore to prevent woods fires.

In 1938 the State Division of Forestry inaugurated a program in forest fire protection. Since that time, seven 100

foot forest fire towers have been erected and a forest fire protection headquarters established in southern Illinois. Forest fire fighting personnel has been hired and the necessary tools and equipment purchased. As a result, 1,393,622 acres of forest and potential forest lands are now receiving fire protection. This program will be enlarged as funds permit until such time that our entire 3,500,000 acres in need of forest fire protection are under either intensive or extensive protection.

Our forest resources are a most valuable asset to Illinois and one of the most valuable renewable resources that we have. They can only be so, however, if adequate forest fire protection is afforded them.

### **Woodland Management**

Illinois' total forest acreage, when our first settlers came to the State, included 15,273,000 acres of the finest timber to be found in the middle west. This represented 42 percent of the total acreage. Although Illinois today is considered strictly an agricultural State, at one time we were rich in forest resources and they were the State's most valuable asset. Today Illinois has but 3,100,000 acres of woodlands, most of which is in need of intensive woodland management. The trained foresters of the Division of Forestry will continue to make every effort to assist farmers and landowners in their woodland management problems. It is vitally necessary that proper forestry practices be conducted on our woodlands today in order that the landowners realize an income from their forest lands and thereby make them an asset rather than a liability. Advice on woodland management is available free of charge from the Division.

The marketing and proper utilization of our existing forest resources is the concern of the Division of Forestry. Approximately 1,000 small sawmills are operating in the State and, of course, much timber is needed annually to keep such mills in operation. Every effort will be made to advise timber landowners as to proper cutting practices and disposal of merchantable timber.

## **State Forests**

The State at present has 10,314 acres in State forests. It is hoped that this acreage can be enlarged in future years as State appropriations permit. The above acreage includes three State forests located in Union, Mason and Henderson counties. Illinois State forests will always be smaller than those of other states due to the availability of lands and high land values. The Division's proposed State forest plan provides for a large number of small State forests throughout the State which would serve as ideal examples of proper woodland management and reforestation practices. As funds permit these will be acquired in the future.

Our State forests provide ideal recreational areas at present and thousands of visitors use them annually. In addition, as the timber matures on them, they will provide a revenue from timber sales and become self-sustaining.

## **Community Forests**

Community forests are the oldest type of forest lands in public ownership. Some have been in existence for 200 years in the eastern states and records of older community forests have been found in some of the European countries. The Division of Forestry is cooperating with counties and communities in an effort to get a large scale community forest program in Illinois. To date there are 53 community forests having a total acreage of 51,503 acres. During the last two years 578,400 trees have been planted on these areas in cooperation with the Division of Forestry.

Seven counties in the State have County Forest Preserve Districts at present. The ratio of ten acres for each 1,000 population within the county appears to be a fair goal for county forest preserve systems in accordance with the Illinois State Planning Commission. On this basis 19 counties in Illinois should have forest preserves.